

Mountain Lakes Fishing

Anglers are attracted to Idaho mountain (alpine) lakes for a variety of reasons including solitude and spectacular views – in addition to great fishing. Whatever the reason, Idaho alpine lakes are tremendously popular.

Idaho has more than 3,000 alpine lakes of which about 1,300 are stocked or have natural fish populations. Fish and Game typically stocks these lakes via airplane, but some lakes are stocked by horseback or backpack. Stocked species include rainbow trout, grayling, golden trout, and cutthroat trout to name a few. Some of these fish species are exclusive to mountain lakes – yet another reason to give them a try.



Joe Kozfkay, IDFG



Martin Koenig, IDFG

Mountain lakes are special places that can produce trophy trout

In most cases, mountain lakes are stocked with trout fry on a three-year cycle. The lakes are cold, pristine and often so clear you can see the bottom. In these conditions, fish grow slowly; it may take 3 to 4 years for a fish to reach “keeper” size. Limited natural food further slows growth rates, but makes these fish eager to bite.

Use the Idaho Fish Planner - located on the Fish and Game website - to help choose where to fish based on fish species of interest, access, fish stocking history and recent fish sampling. Remember that some mountain lakes were stocked years ago and those fish are reproducing on their own so there may

be great fishing even though a lake has not been stocked recently.

Most mountain lakes can be reached only on foot or by horseback, while a handful are accessible by vehicle. Some are along well-marked trails. Many others are in truly remote, backcountry locations. The more remote the lake, the less likely you’ll be sharing it with other anglers. A good set of topographic maps, a compass and a GPS unit will help you find your destination.

Mountain lakes fishing equipment should include a break-down fishing rod in a sturdy case. Many anglers pack in a lightweight float tube which allows for easier fishing. Fly anglers should consider bringing both floating and sinking fly line and a small assortment of wet and dry flies. Remember that these fish are looking for food and usually aren’t too finicky. Spin anglers should bring along a small selection of flashy spinners, spoons or crankbaits.

Natural baits, including grasshoppers, beetles and stonefly larvae, can also be used.

As with other types of fishing, check the regulations before you go. Most mountain lakes have general rules, but some have special gear, size or bag limit restrictions. Handle fish properly when catch and release fishing. And please help preserve these special places by packing out your trash.

